

This story takes place in 1946 while I was laying over in the Kensington Place Hotel, London. I had received a phone call explaining that a DC-4 landed in Hern, England with one engine feathered. Would I ferry this airplane to Shannon, Ireland with three remaining engines operating? This would require a three engine take off and be in a dangerous position, if another engine should fail during the climb, for at least the first five hundred feet of altitude.

I agreed to operate the flight and was transported to Hern on a train along with a copilot and a flight engineer. We arrived late in the evening and I was greeted by a company man, explaining to me that they were all set for the flight and had a flight plan and clearance for us to get the operation underway. I had a feeling that they were in a hurry. It would be poor judgement to take off at night, into instrument conditions, on three engines. I made it clear, that we would not be taking off until the next morning. They said that they were very disappointed, but would delay the flight until morning.

The next morning we checked the plane over and ground tested the three operating engines and took off for Shannon, Ireland. Just as we were climbing above the overcast the engineer pointed to a oil quantity gage that was showing a loss of oil at a very fast rate, on number two engine. I said, "feather it now." This meant we were now flying on two engines.

We were relatively light, because we did not have any passengers or cargo and could hold altitude on two engines without any problem. We had also lost our main flight instruments on both sides of the cockpit and needed them to fly on instruments. The reason why the instruments were out, was due to the fact that they are operated off the inboard engines and we had both inboard engines feathered. (Shut down)

I called the Hern Tower and told them we were returning and needed a clearance. They gave us a clearance and at the same time the company dispatcher came back to us on the radio asking me if I would consider diverting up to the London Airport, because it was only about seventy five miles away. I came back and stated that we would not attempt to fly to London. Some times you are lucky in the decision one makes and this one turned out to be a good one. I was able to use the automatic radio direction finder as a turn indicator and the bottom half of the turn and bank indicator ball to keep the proper direction and wings level while descending down through the over cast. The cloud layer was about five hundred feet above the ground. As we turned on final into the Hern Airport I briefed the engineer to unfeather the engine we had feathered. This allowed us to operate the landing gear and wing flaps down for the landing and give us some braking to a stop. The hydraulic pumps are on the inboard engines and we had both inboard engines feathered. We did not start the engine that was unfeathered, but let it wind mill to operate the hydraulic pump. The airplane will not hold altitude with only two engines operating and with one wind milling, but we were descending into the airport and could get away with it if an allowance was made for some extra altitude on final approach to take care of the

~~and~~ milling engine, but it took a lot more than I had allowed. As a result we just made the end of the runway for the landing.

The company sent us back to London on the train and decided to change two engines on the airplane at Hern. Sounds like the end of the story, but it is not. After they installed two new engines a new crew was sent to Hern to fly the airplane to Shannon, Ireland. After they took off from Hern, another engine failed. The engine that failed was not one of the new engines. If we had attempted to fly to London Airport, as the dispatcher had requested, we would not have made it, because we would have been on only one engine. Four engine airplanes do not fly on one engine.

It was later discovered that a major error took place during engine overhaul and all four of these engines on this airplane had been over hauled with the same problem.

This is one of many of the stories I am recording. I was twenty nine years old when this situation took place and I had thirty one more years of airline flying ahead of me.